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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this paper were to review the literature and examine the available research in the area of the effectiveness of substitute teachers in secondary education; and to identify problems and suggested remedies associated with substitute teaching from the perspectives of school administrators, substitute teachers, and students. The literature describes many problems substitute teachers face and suggests that the perceived effectiveness of substitute teachers is worse than that of first year and student teachers. Several studies cite poor classroom management skills as substitutes' single greatest problem. Recommendations to address the identified problems include inservice training for substitute teachers in classroom management techniques. Although the review failed to answer the question of what makes effective secondary education substitute teachers, some alternative suggestions for improving substitute teaching were identified. Based upon these findings, a list of suggested guidelines for improving the teaching experience of secondary education substitutes is appended. (Contains 17 references.) (LL)

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Interpretation & Evaluation of
Educational Research

Literature Review

# What Makes Effective Secondary Education Substitute Teachers?

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# What Makes Effective Secondary Education Substitute Teachers?

## Introduction

The objective of this review is to examine existing research and literature regarding the effectiveness of substitute teachers in secondary education. The very title, substitute teacher, denotes various connotations. Some of these are self-imposed by substitutes, others are based upon views of the educational community; most are not very positive. Since substitutes are not integrated into any formal school structure, their teaching environment has been described as marginal at best (Clifton & Rambaran, 1987; Koelling, 1983). Yet, the literature suggests that the influence substitute teachers have on students and the educational system can be significant and is growing. Research has found that 5-8% of the school year is spent with a substitute teacher and this percentage is increasing (Decay & Bontempo, 1986; Feldman, 1981; Johnson, Holcombe, & Vance 1986; Koelling, 1983; Warren, 1988). Issues of substitute teachers range from the financial costs to school districts to basic student learning.

Given the reported significance that substitute teachers play in our educational system, it is interesting to note that in general the views of this profession remain less than positive. The literature is filled with descriptions of problems that substitute face. Clifton and Rambaran (1987) cite, "Substitute teachers often experience anxiety and do not feel satisfied, competent, or recognized as belonging to the educational community" (p. 310). Drake (1981) labels substitute teachers the "spare tire" (p. 74) of American education. Tracy (1988) cites a study

reporting secondary substitute teacher effectiveness as 0.27 compared to a 5.01 rating for regular classroom teachers. In general, the literature suggests that the viewed effectiveness of substitute teachers is worse than that of first year and student teachers. Rawson (1981) suggests that some of the problems encountered by substitute teachers may be attributed to the low priority given to this task by our educational system.

This paper will identify problems associated with secondary education substitute teaching, suggested remedies, and review the status of some remedies. Based upon the literature reviewed, it will present the perspectives of school administrators, substitute teachers, and students on the topic. Additionally, it will include a critical review of research and the literature cited. In reviewing the literature, every attempt was made to find studies relevant only to substitute teaching for secondary education. Most of the references cited are such. However, in some cases information pertaining to the topic of substitute teaching in a K-12 environment was utilized provided reference was not limited to grade levels other than those associated with secondary education.

Substitute teachers have been labelled by many names: professionals, mercenaries not interested in teaching, baby-sitters, one-day employees, and a host of other titles. For the purpose of this review, Drake's definition of the substitute teacher will be used with a slight modification. He (Drake, 1981, p. 75) "theoretically" defined a substitute teacher as:

> A certified and qualified professional who replaces the regular classroom teacher for the purpose of continuing the instruction program, maintaining discipline and generally promoting the educational welfare of the students.

The modification noted to the above definition replaces 'certified' with 'college graduate'. Additionally, the term administrator is defined to include: principals, vice-principals, school board members, superintendents, assistant superintendents, and other 'non-teaching educators' at a school district level with the power to make decisions and effect change regarding policies, like substitute teaching. Educators, when used in this paper, refers to professors, instructors, and program directors at a college level in the field of education who can influence the learning of future teachers and content of their educational curriculum. Collaboration is a term that will be utilized in this review and is difficult to define. Several articles used the term but none provided a clear definition. It includes some of the following elements: fostering an atmosphere of teamwork between the substitute and regular classroom teacher; maintaining open communication between the substitute and school; viewing the substitute as a professional; recognition for the substitute; and actively involving/integrating the substitute in school professional and social activities other than just the duties performed as a substitute teacher. Emphasis in this definition is on terms like: teamwork, professional, integration, and social activities.

## Critical Review

Many of the problems associated with substitute teaching reported by school administrators and educators appear to be based upon anecdotal observations. Problems cited (Drake, 1981; Rawson, 1981; Warren, 1988) include: (1) ambiguous roles for substitutes and unclear expectations, (2) the lack of feedback of, and evaluation to substitutes, (3) the lack of collaboration between substitutes

and the educational system, (4) the substitute's lack of authority, and (5) poor classroom management and disciplinary skills on the part of substitute teachers. The last problem, relating to discipline, appeared to be the single greatest concern of school administrators. Also, it is interesting to note that Drake's work (1981) was cited in more of the references included in this literature review than any other article.

Clifton and Rambaran (1987) analyzed information collected from 146 sample participants based upon direct observations, interviews, written essays, and data categories regarding perceived problems with substitute teaching. Study participants included 30 substitute teachers, 23 administrators, 20 regular classroom teachers, and 73 students. Their findings were then tabulated by the category of sample participant, e.g. administrator. In general, their results were consistent with the problems previously noted as viewed by administrators. All of the authors cited above, regarding the administrator's view, provided recommendations aimed at addressing the problems observed.

Two descriptive studies, conducted on problems experienced by substitutes, lend support to the views that administrators hold regarding substituting teaching. Johnson et al. (1988) analyzed 205 questionnaires, mailed to 378 substitute teachers, requesting that they rate the degree of anxiety experienced relative to 43 factors relating to teaching. Of the substitutes surveyed, 54.6% had one year or less teaching experience. Using an analysis of variance and Tukey-HSD follow-up procedures, the researchers examined the data to determine what factors caused the most apprehension, and if there were significant differences among substitutes based upon the number of years teaching experience. Their conclusions also

included suggested remedies for problems noted. They found that more than 15% of the substitutes had some level of anxiety for 26 of the 43 factors. Moreover, approximately 30% to 58% felt anxiety in factors associated with: their role, discipline, lesson plans, collaboration (as defined above), and classroom management procedures. The researchers also noted some differences in the anxiety factors identified by substitutes based upon their years of experience. The more experienced substitutes had greater concerns with their acceptance by the educational community and issues of collaboration.

Deay and Bontempo sampled 175 substitutes, of which 76 were certified in secondary education. The substitutes were requested to provide three responses to the question, "What kinds of information do substitutes feel would be most valuable?" They were provided eight defined categories to choose from. Over 50% of the substitutes responded that they required more information on classroom procedures and school rules. Additionally, 13% were concerned about their professional role, 13% requested in-service training, and 10% were concerned about discipline.

Research also suggests that students have a poor view of substitute teacher. Clifton and Rambaran (1987) note that students view substitutes as "incompetent teachers who can not do anything other than supervise" (p. 317). Drake (1981) alludes to the substitute's lack of authority and states students see the role of the substitute teacher as "temporary, ill-defined, and naturally ambiguous" (p. 75). In an interesting study conducted by Parsons and Dillon (1978), they found that "58% of all students had negative things to say about substitute teaching" (p. 2). This was based upon the views of a sample of secondary education college students studying

to be teachers! Of this response, 30% viewed substitute teaching as nothing more than "baby-sitting" (Parsons & Dillon, 1978, p. 3).

Thus far, only problems identified with substitute teaching have been identified; following is a discussion of solutions contained in the literature reviewed. Based upon the references cited previously, where recommendations were provided for the noted problems, and the works of Koelling (1983), Peterson (1991), Simmons (1991), Soares (1988), and Stanley (1991), suggested areas of improvement were categorized and clustered by common remedies. Included are thirteen references in total representing the observations and findings of: 3 administrators, 3 educators, 1 researcher, and 6 descriptive studies on substitute teaching. The categorized recommendations were ranked based upon the number of articles that suggested them. Thus, a recommendation could have any value ranging from 1 to 13, if all the articles suggested it. The top 7 most recommended areas of opportunity for improving substitute teaching were:

(1) Provide substitute teachers inservice training on topics such as discipline, classroom management, etc. - 10/13.

(2) Improve the collaboration between the substitute teacher and school district - 9/13.

(3) Provide evaluation of, and feedback to, substitute teachers on the services that they render - 7/13.

(4) Improve the school's substitute recruitment procedures, e.g. interview, establish criteria, etc. - 5/13.

(5) Provide a substitute teacher's handbook on school rules and policies - 4/13.

(6) Provide role clarification and clear expectations of all substitute teachers - 4/13.

(7) Improve lesson plans provided - 2/13.

It should be noted that of the thirteen references utilized, two were very specific in their area of study and were not represented in any of the above recommendations. These were the works of Parsons and Dillon (1978) and Soares (1988). Perhaps they should be discounted when considering the relative merit of each recommendation noted above.

Given the cumulative recommendations of the literature noted, it is interesting to examine the status of four of the top five findings. In an extensive study of school policies and procedures regarding substitute teachers, Koelling (1983) summarized the results of 29 questions responded to by 1728 school districts from 19 different states in the North Central Region. This represented an 81.4% return on questionnaires from the 2123 districts canvassed. The questions dealt with a variety of topics extending from the pay and benefits of substitute teachers, to their qualifications, to the district's administration of the program and general policies. While the study did not identify the exact region surveyed, perhaps due to the sample size its findings might also have external validity throughout most of the United States. The survey reported results by the size of the school district's student enrollment; districts were grouped based upon enrollments under 1000, 5000, 10,000, and over 10,000.

Regarding inservice training for substitute teachers, Koelling (1983) reported that 26.9% of the responding districts provided it, while 73.1% did not. Regarding evaluation of, and feedback to substitute teachers, he (Koelling, 1983) found that 28.4% of the respondents followed this procedure, while 71.6% did not. Finally, with regards to providing a substitute handbook on school rules and policies, he

(Koelling, 1983) reported that 34.8% of the respondents did provide one, while 65.2% did not. Respondents were informed that they could omit questions that they did not want to respond to. However, total responses on these three questions ranged from a high of 1566 to a low of 1547 districts. It was also interesting to note that the smaller school districts responded more favorable on all three questions by a factor of almost 2 to 1.

Based upon the results of this study, Koelling (1983, p. 171) concluded that,

> The most compelling summary which can be made about the foregoing data is that most school districts do not have, in place, a comprehensive, systematic and effective substitute teacher program.

Koelling's research did not measure any information on factors of collaboration.

Substitute teachers employed by four different local school districts within a 50 mile radius of Marist College were also questioned regarding district policies (E. D. Ostapczuk, *personal communications, Nov. 1 - Dec. 13, 1993*). While this is an extremely small sample, findings appear similar to the results of Koelling's (1983) study previously discussed. Only two of four school districts provided inservice substitute teacher training and/or handbooks. With regards to evaluation of, and feedback to, and collaboration, none of three districts had positive responses.

Given the apparent status of the identified problems associated with substitute teaching and recommended remedies to address these, it is difficult to reconcile the significance of the problems identified. One can only speculate that perhaps the problems are not that significant, or perhaps the solutions recommended are not the correct ones. If the solutions are correct, then it might be that they are not cost effective, or the problems associated with substitute teaching are not of a high

priority nature compared to some of the other problems facing school districts today. Nonetheless, it seems clear that there is a gap in what research suggests be done regarding substitute teaching and what is practiced. Hence, one needs to question how applicable this information is to classroom and school practices.

Furthermore, it appears that some of the problems identified by this literature review, and their recommended solutions, are longstanding in nature. In a published literature review conducted by an Indiana University graduate student (Feldman, 1981), the author examined 76 studies and articles on substitute teaching dating back to 1931. Based upon a cursory review of the 76 abstracts provided, it seems that the problems identified in substitute teaching, and their recommended solutions, have not changed since the 1960's, but in fact, may be getting worse.

Regarding the quality of the research reviewed, most of the information gathered was based upon anecdotal observations and descriptive studies. Much has been written about this topic but little of what is said has been subjected to any rigorous statistical evaluation. Even many of the descriptive studies fail to be more than summaries of tabulated results with little statistical scrutiny. There appears to be a lot of opinions on the subject of substitute teaching, but few facts that have withstood the rigors of statistical examination; hence the external validity of some of the information is suspect.

Additionally, the seven cumulative recommendations, previously noted, resulted from secondary sources of information where few operational definitions were provided. Some of the categories, such as collaboration and role clarification, are somewhat 'fuzzy' in nature and were subjected to the interpretations of the original researcher and this reviewer. While every attempt was made to be consistent in

interpreting the data presented, it was, nonetheless, the product of certain biases and personal knowledge regarding substitute teaching on the part of this reviewer.

Among the literature reviewed, some other interesting alternative solutions were suggested to address problems faced by substitute teachers. Many of these can be found referenced in Feldman's (1981) review of literature. Assuming that the cost of some of the cumulative recommendations is a major inhibitor in the lack of their implementation, then this list of alternatives might provide some interesting approaches for addressing acknowledged problems in substitute teaching. Alternative improvement suggestions include the following:

(1) Have regular classroom teachers substitute for each other. This 'training' can be accomplished at no cost to the school district and would allow regular teachers to uncover problems inherent in the school district's substitute policies so that they can be evaluated and addressed.

(2) Invite approved substitute teachers to school district staff development and inservice training. This should help foster a spirit of better teamwork and improve collaboration between the substitute and school district.

(3) Appoint a school district substitute teacher coordinator. This should provide a better district interface to substitutes helping to clarify roles, expectations, and improve communications and collaboration.

(4) Develop an interdisciplinary approach to substitute teaching at a secondary education level.

(5) Establish a college-school district graduate student work study program. For additional details on this alternative, refer to Parsons and Dillon (1978).

(6) Establish an internship mentor program, perhaps in place of student teaching. For additional details on this alternative, refer to Soares (1988).

## Summary

In spite of the noted shortcomings, the research and literature cited does provide a beginning place to understand the problems associated with substitute teaching in secondary education. It offers some recommendations to address the identified problems although it seems that few of the recommendations are implemented by school districts today. It appears that Koelling (1983) and Rawson (1981) might be correct in their observations that problems encountered by substitute teachers may be attributed to the low priority given this task by the educational system. This dichotomy between research and practice, problem and solution, makes for some interesting follow-on research.

Topics for further research on substitute teaching in a secondary education environment should consider the following questions. Why has the educational community failed to act upon recommendations to address noted problems? This could be a very logical extension to Koelling's (1983) work. Why did the school districts respond in the fashion that they did, and what is the significance of their responses? Given that problems do exist in substitute teaching, research could study alternative solutions to those already noted. Additionally, given the apparent longstanding nature of substitute teaching problems, what is their significance to the educational community and student learning, and what developmental trends are unfolding? Where do the problems of substitute teaching rank in the priority order of problems that school districts face today? This question could be investigated on a cost and/or impact to education basis.

Unfortunately, this literature review failed to answer the question it set out to address, "What Makes Effective Secondary Substitute Teachers?" Instead, problems faced by substitute teachers have been identified along with recommended solutions and their status. Hopefully, some insight has been rendered on the problems associated with substitute teaching and perhaps some alternative solutions worth pursuing were re-identified.

The literature does provide some positive suggestions for improving the substitute teacher's opportunity to have a worthwhile experience. These were presented from the substitute teacher's frame of reference. Hence, in spite of working in a marginal environment each substitute has some individual control that he/she can take responsibility for. Suggested recommendations can be found in the works of Calkins (1989), McKay (1991), Parsons and Dillon (1978), Stanley (1991), and Warren (1988). Based upon this research, and active research on the part of this reviewer, suggested guidelines for improving the teaching experience of secondary education substitute teachers can be developed (see the Appendix for a list of suggested guidelines). While these guidelines may not help make the substitute an effective teacher, they might help develop an environment where the substitute could become an effective teacher.

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Appendix

ESP

Ed's Survival Pointers

- Be prepared, arrive early, do your "G2"
- Be assertive, establish control immediately
  - Be confident, like a "professional gambler"
  - Assume authority that you don't have, no one will give it to you
- Remember, "kids are kids"
  - They are active, inventive, intimidating, devious
    - They will test you
  - They are fun and full of life
    - Be flexible, have fun but remember who's in charge
- Keep students busy
  - Let students know that their work counts
  - Be ready to implement contingency action if lesson plan is lacking
  - Collect work at end of period
- Try not to raise your voice
  - Don't make an issue out of every problem
  - Use eye contact and other non-verbal signs when possible
  - Don't belittle student in front of peers
    - Address problems one on one
    - Use "time out" when necessary
- Circulate throughout classroom, stay on your feet
- Leave feedback for regular classroom teacher
  - Inform teacher on what you did
  - Don't be afraid to leave negative feedback on a student, if necessary
  - Leave classroom in condition that you found it
- Teaching experience depends on how you frame it
  - Substitute can be more than "baby-sitters"

Source: Active research

Supported by: Calkins (1989), McKay (1991), Parsons and Dillon (1978), Stanley (1991), Warren (1988)